



Security Council

Distr.: General
11 May 2022

Original: English

Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [2391 \(2017\)](#) of 8 December 2017, in which the Council requested the Secretary-General, in close coordination with the members of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel) – Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger – and the African Union, to report on the activities of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel and the support provided by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in this regard. The Council adopted resolution [2584 \(2021\)](#) on 29 June 2021, renewing the mandate of MINUSMA, including enhanced support from MINUSMA to the Joint Force as authorized by the Council in resolution [2531 \(2020\)](#). The present report covers the period from 12 November 2021 to 9 May 2022.

2. The highly volatile political and security situation in the Sahel had an impact on the operationalization of the Joint Force during the reporting period. Among other issues, uncertainty over the transition timelines in Mali and the 23 January coup d'état in Burkina Faso significantly slowed down the Joint Force's operational tempo, particularly in Sector Centre and Sector West.

II. Operationalization of the Joint Force

A. Deployment update on the military

3. Persisting differences between the transition authorities in Mali and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) over the duration of the transition had an impact on the dynamics among States members of the G5 Sahel and rendered the identification of common objectives and the definition of a shared vision for the future of the Joint Force more challenging. The annual Summit of Heads of State of the States members of the G5 Sahel, initially scheduled for January 2022, was postponed indefinitely. Currently, Chad maintains the presidency of the G5 Sahel. In addition, no meeting of the Defence and Security Committee, which determines strategic and equipment plans on which basis the Joint Force Commander plans his operations, was held during the reporting period. In the absence of formal strategic guidance, the Force Commander, General Oumar Bikimo, nonetheless developed an



operations campaign plan in close consultation with the chiefs of defence staff of the States members of the G5 Sahel, prioritizing Sectors West and Centre.

4. On 23 January, the President of Burkina Faso, Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, was forced out of office through a military coup. Consequently, the Burkinabe battalion did not participate in Operation Kana 1. The tri-border area in Sector Centre, a priority area of intervention for the Joint Force, remained the area most affected by the expansion of terrorism in the Sahel. With two out of the three countries in Sector Centre undergoing uncertain political transitions and partially or entirely opting out of operations, the Joint Force's operational tempo significantly slowed down.

5. During the reporting period, the Joint Force conducted four reconnaissance operations in the tri-border area between Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger in Sector Center: Operation Wafo, from 16 to 20 November 2021; Operation Hamokargui, from 15 to 18 January 2022; Operation Kana 1, from 2 to 4 February; and Operation Kana 2 from 26 February to 3 March. The Joint Force reported that the four operations served to reaffirm its presence in Sector Centre and resulted in securing main transportation axes.

6. Operation Kana 1 was jointly conducted by Chadian and Nigerien battalions, and according to the Joint Force leadership, led to the "neutralization" of several terrorist elements and the destruction of terrorist groups' assets on Burkinabe territory. Operation Kana 2 was jointly conducted by the Chadian, Nigerien and Burkinabe battalions in Sector Centre, reportedly resulting in the capture of several members of extremist armed groups, who were subsequently handed over to the provost unit in the Niger.

7. In Sector West, the Joint Force intensified operations to combat drug, arms and human trafficking. In January, the Mauritanian battalion of the Joint Force conducted Operation Elgueuede to gather intelligence between M'beiket Lahwach in Mauritania and the Malian border.

8. In Sector East, the Joint Force carried out routine patrols to deter hostile elements and to secure main transportation axes along the border area with Libya.

9. In March, with the support of French forces, the rotation of the Chadian battalion of the Joint Force stationed in Téra, the Niger, in Sector Centre, was completed.

10. The infiltration and increased mobility of terrorist armed elements within local communities continued to present a major challenge for the Joint Force, both in terms of identifying suitable informants and protecting civilians during operations. In addition, the Joint Force leadership reported conflicting chains of command as a major impediment to the Force's full operationalization. Obtaining reliable and verifiable information on the outcomes of the Joint Force's operations also remained a major challenge. MINUSMA continued to convene coordination and information-sharing meetings between the Mission and the Joint Force leadership.

B. Deployment update on the police component

11. The United Nations police component participated in two workshops alongside representatives of States members of the G5 Sahel. The first workshop, on the evaluation of the implementation of the human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework for the Joint Force, organized by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) was held in Bamako on 7 December 2021.

12. The second workshop, held in N'Djamena from 24 to 27 January, was organized by EUCAP Sahel and Expertise France on the operationalization of the police component of the Joint Force. United Nations police participated and contributed to training sessions on the work of judicial police and the development of provost police units.

C. Secretariat and institutional framework of the Group of Five for the Sahel

13. On 9 March, the ministerial meeting of the Coalition for the Sahel was held virtually, chaired by the High Representative of the Coalition, Djimé Adoum. Participants at the meeting took stock of the deteriorating security and humanitarian conditions across the Sahel region. They reiterated the support of member States and partners to the G5 Sahel and its Joint Force and recalled the importance of providing its battalions with appropriate equipment. They also welcomed the operationalization of the G5 Sahel Defence College in Nouakchott and the International Counter-Terrorism Academy in Abidjan. Coalition members emphasized the need for deeper consultations between the G5 Sahel Executive Secretariat and the Sahel Alliance, and coordination between the G5 Sahel, the Accra Initiative, ECOWAS and the African Union.

14. On 4 April, the Sahel Alliance convened a meeting in Madrid of the G5 Sahel and other regional institutions for consultations on the impact of collective initiatives in support of development in the Sahel to counter the consequences of extreme weather and climate-related events, inflation of commodity prices and threats to food security.

III. Implementation of the technical agreement

15. During the reporting period, MINUSMA continued to provide life support consumables, including petroleum products and rations, to the eight battalions of the Joint Force, in accordance with the tripartite agreement and Security Council resolutions [2391 \(2017\)](#), [2480 \(2019\)](#), [2531 \(2020\)](#) and [2584 \(2021\)](#).

Life support consumables

16. From November to January, the Mission delivered, through one national (Malian) and two international contractors, a total of 702,684 litres of petroleum products, 11,381 litres of lubricants and 84,340 ration packs for the fourth quarter of 2021, in compliance with the human rights due diligence policy.

17. From January to March, the Mission commenced preparations for deliveries in accordance with the support requests received on 23 December 2021, for the first quarter of 2022. This comprised 86,300 litres of petroleum products and 5,440 rations packs. Deliveries under the enhanced support model through contractors started on 11 April, and 7,000 litres out of 25,000 litres of diesel were delivered to the Joint Force headquarters in accordance with storage capacity. Preparations for the second quarter have commenced, and for the period from June to July 2022, MINUSMA will deliver 86,300 litres of petroleum products and 8,300 ration packs.

Engineering support

18. MINUSMA completed the construction of a hard wall septic tank, a soak pit and two water and sanitation facilities at the Joint Force headquarters in Bamako on 10 November 2021, amounting to \$16,034.25. In addition, on 25 November 2021, the Mission constructed a concrete platform for the fuel tank, at the headquarters for a total cost of \$1,977.95.

Casualty evacuation and transport

19. MINUSMA carried out an assessment of financial implications for the provision of air support (special flights) for the rotation of the Téra II battalion in the Niger, consisting of 800 Chadian troops, planned for the period between March and May. The rotation was conducted by Operation Barkhane from 21 to 24 March. Reportedly, 733 out of 850 Chadian troops were transported from Niamey to N'Djamena, and only 520 troops were transported back from N'Djamena to Niamey, and later deployed to the battalion location in Téra 2, the Niger.

20. No casualty evacuations were conducted by the Mission, as no request was received during the reporting period.

Issues and challenges

21. The lack of storage capacity at the battalions' areas of operations remained a matter of concern and had an impact on the delivery process in the last quarter of 2021. Only the Mauritanian battalion had put the requested storage capacity in place. MINUSMA provided interim solutions, in collaboration with the Joint Force Commander. For combat rations, the Mission rented 10 reefer containers, and for petroleum products, partial deliveries and truck-to-truck transfers were implemented for all but the Mauritanian battalion.

22. The provision of tax exemptions by the States members of the G5 Sahel continued to be challenging. Although the member States had committed to granting the exemptions for all consumables transported through port authorities and directly distributed by contractors to the battalions, delays in honouring the commitments resulted in delayed deliveries for some of the life consumables.

23. To address the issues, with regard to deliveries in the first quarter of 2022, the Mission intensified its outreach by communicating with the Joint Force Commander and the G5 Sahel national authorities. In the interim, the Logistics Division of the Department of Operational Support of the Secretariat has been working to include additional and/or temporary delivery points to ensure unhindered deliveries.

24. Insecurity due to terrorist activities along supply routes continued to pose challenges to the delivery process. The Mission, in consultation with the Joint Force, introduced alternate supply routes as opposed to initially identified routes, between November 2021 and January 2022. On 25 February, Burkinabe Armed Forces serving as security escorts for Joint Force troops heading towards the battalion location in Dori, Burkina Faso, to inspect the stock balance, were attacked by unidentified armed elements along the route from Dori to Kaya, Burkina Faso. Reportedly, six assailants were neutralized when the Joint Force repelled the attack, but several soldiers were wounded.

IV. Implementation of the human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework and the human rights due diligence policy

25. MINUSMA and OHCHR continued to support the Joint Force in human rights and humanitarian law compliance, capacity-building, the fight against impunity and the implementation of the human rights due diligence policy.

26. From 11 to 20 December 2021, OHCHR organized the third round of the G5 Sahel course on human rights and international humanitarian law for 23 senior officers of the Joint Force headquarters, provosts and legal advisors (22 men and 1 woman) from the three Sectors. The training was conducted in collaboration with MINUSMA, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Centre for Civilians in Conflict, the International Institute of Humanitarian Law, Expertise France and the Chief of Defence of the French Armed Forces. It was focused on the general principles of the law of armed conflict and international human rights law, as well as the international humanitarian law compliance framework of the Joint Force and the operational context of the Joint Force.

27. From 13 to 16 December 2021, OHCHR, in collaboration with the National Human Rights Commission of Burkina Faso, held a workshop on human rights monitoring, reporting and advocacy for 30 representatives of the Ministry of Justice of Burkina Faso, the Commission and civil society organizations (21 men and 9 women). OHCHR continued to strengthen the capacity of civil society actors in the areas of human rights monitoring and reporting.

28. During the reporting period, OHCHR increased its outreach to Joint Force battalions and sector command posts and conducted sensitization activities for 24 participants from the battalion based in Dori on 24 November; 39 participants from the sector command post in Chad on 8 and 9 December; and 57 participants in the Niger on 2 and 30 December.

29. Regarding the operationalization of the police component, OHCHR organized the first “after-action-review” session of the compliance framework implemented by the police component of the Joint Force. The session was held in Bamako from 7 to 10 December, and 25 participants from the Joint Force and national special investigation units focused on serious crimes, such as terrorism. The G5 Sahel Executive Secretariat and provosts (previously and currently deployed with the Joint Force) also brainstormed on ways to strengthen and accelerate the judicialization of the field operations. The session provided an opportunity to share achievements, experiences and good practices related to the contribution of the police component to the implementation of the compliance framework. Participants likewise discussed the integration of women in the operations of the Joint Force.

30. From 21 to 25 February, OHCHR trained 40 members, including 5 women, of the Joint Force from both the headquarters and sector command posts, and Executive Secretariat on information management, media relations and appropriate communication on alleged or actual human rights violations involving the Joint Force.

31. During the reporting period, OHCHR and MINUSMA continued to engage with the national authorities in Chad, Mali and the Niger to ensure accountability for serious crimes imputed to elements of the Joint Force.

32. In accordance with the human rights due diligence policy, MINUSMA conducted 18 risk assessments on requests for support submitted by the Joint Force, recommending targeted mitigation measures. For example, further sensitization

sessions on international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law were recommended to soldiers and units of the battalions. In addition, MINUSMA recommended that the Joint Force launch internal investigations into allegations of serious human rights violations in the areas of operation of the Malian battalions, in accordance with the Joint Force's standard operating procedure on internal investigations. As in previous periods, limited progress was made in relation to the implementation of the mitigation measures. For its part, MINUSMA is looking into allegations of gross human rights violations committed by Malian forces, in some instances deployed alongside foreign military personnel. To continue to enhance compliance with the human rights due diligence policy, MINUSMA conducted two sensitization sessions for a total of 36 elements of the Joint Force (35 men and 1 woman) in Bamako on 11 November and 11 December 2021.

Issues and challenges

33. Political developments in some States members of the G5 Sahel adversely affected the implementation of the project aimed at supporting the Joint Force in implementing the human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework. For example, the 12th meeting of the G5 Sahel Defence and Security Committee, initially scheduled to be held from 24 to 27 January, was postponed following the military coup in Burkina Faso. This resulted in delaying the implementation of the police component directive and the action plan developed at the December 2019 workshop on the judicialization of the field of operations, both of which were supposed to be deliberated upon by the Committee.

34. Determining whether Malian Armed Forces acted under the command-and-control of the Joint Force or under national command, particularly when investigating alleged human rights violations, remains an important challenge for the United Nations in Mali.

V. Observations

35. The Joint Force of the Group of Five of the Sahel remains an important initiative, testament to the commitment of its member States. It complements the multifaceted engagements by the United Nations in the region and merits the international community's support. In the long term, regionally led solutions devised by key stakeholders are the most effective way to ensure sustainability, create lasting peace and stability, and fully tap into the potential that the region harbours. I am deeply concerned by the rapidly deteriorating security situation in the Sahel, as well as by the potentially debilitating effect that the uncertain political situation in Mali, Burkina Faso and beyond will have on efforts to further operationalize the G5 Sahel Joint Force and to address the underlying causes of instability and improve governance.

36. I am also seriously disturbed by the deteriorating human rights situation, amid reports of gruesome violations committed against civilians, not only by terrorist armed groups but also, reportedly, by armed and security forces in the region. Against that backdrop, G5 Sahel authorities should unreservedly commit and intensify efforts with regard to upholding and protecting human rights. This is important for the success of efforts to combat terrorism, improve security and gain the trust of communities. The United Nations will continue working closely with the Joint Force leadership to prevent and mitigate human rights violations.

37. A lack of consensus among partners and donors on the most effective support mechanism for the Joint Force of the G5 Sahel has proved to be a significant obstacle

to its operationalization. Considering the growing complexity of the crisis facing the Sahel and the urgent need to act now, during the 5th African Union-United Nations annual conference, held most recently in New York on 1 December 2021, the Chairperson of the African Commission and I committed our two organizations, and in close collaboration with ECOWAS and the G5 Sahel, to jointly initiating a strategic assessment with a view to seeking ways to strengthen support to the G5 Sahel, its Joint Force and other security, development and governance initiatives in the Sahel, including through advocacy to mobilize sustainable resourcing. An independent high-level panel on security and development in the Sahel, chaired by former President of the Niger, Mahamadou Issoufou, will lead the strategic assessment. I look forward to the outcomes of the independent assessment and remain convinced that working together is crucial to overcoming the challenges the international community faces in the Sahel.

38. It is critical to resolve the political crises in Mali and Burkina Faso in order to restore constitutional order in both countries as quickly as possible. In this regard, I welcome efforts by ECOWAS and the African Union to secure consensual timelines for the transitions and urge the transition authorities in both countries to extend full cooperation to the ongoing regional efforts. Political stability will provide the space to accelerate key political reform processes, including those foreseen by the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. Progress in the Malian peace process is key to fostering stability in the region.
